

The First Fundamental Proposition of the Secret Doctrine

There are three fundamental propositions that we are told must be comprehended before we can understand the Secret Doctrine, the once universal Wisdom Tradition, now called Theosophy. They are given in the Proem of H. P. Blavatsky's book, *The Secret Doctrine*. I first read these in December of 1973. I could not understand them. Some time later I read the advice that Blavatsky gave shortly before her death, to Robert Bowen, on how to study *The Secret Doctrine*:

The first thing to do, even if it takes years, is to get some grasp of the "Three Fundamental Principles" given in the PROEM.¹

I took this advice to heart, and continued to struggle with them year after year; but it was to little avail. Yesterday, March 17, 2001, more than twenty-seven years later, the light finally came on. I do not know how typical my experience was, yet I cannot help but feel I should write down the results.

The necessity of understanding these fundamental propositions is made clear by Blavatsky when introducing them:

Before the reader proceeds to the consideration of the Stanzas from the Book of Dzyan which form the basis of the present work, it is absolutely necessary that he should be made acquainted with the few fundamental conceptions which underlie and pervade the entire system of thought to which his attention is invited. These basic ideas are few in number, and on their clear apprehension depends the understanding of all that follows; therefore no apology is required for asking the reader to make himself familiar with them first, before entering on the perusal of the work itself.²

The first of the three fundamental propositions established by the Secret Doctrine is stated as:

An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought—in the words of *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*, “unthinkable and unspeakable.”³

Then follow three pages of explanations of this first fundamental proposition. At the end of these explanations is a summary with four numbered items. This is the crux of the problem. The summary is introduced with these words: “The following summary will afford a clearer idea to the reader.” In fact, up to this point, and despite some questions, I thought I could follow the explanations well enough; but this summary, rather than affording me a clearer idea, caused me to doubt my understanding almost entirely.

The problem for me in these explanations of the first fundamental proposition was with the numbers involved. The explanations begin with the one reality. This is symbolized under two aspects. The two aspects of the one reality then make a trinity or metaphysical triad. Then another (fourth?) thing is added to the explanations, Fohat. But the four numbered items in the summary are not the same as the four concepts that were just explained.

Assuming that I was merely getting caught up in the words, I asked my wife Nancy, who is far more intuitive than I am, if she could see how these explanations and the four item summary correlate. When she could not either (and I kept asking her year after year), I knew there was a problem here.

The explanations start by attempting to clarify the above cited statement of the first fundamental proposition.

To render these ideas clearer to the general reader, let him set out with the postulate that there is one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being.⁴

The one absolute reality is there also referred to as the “Infinite and Eternal Cause” (which is, as later clarified, not the “First Cause”), as the “rootless root of ‘all that was, is, or ever shall be,’” and as “‘Be-ness’ rather than Being.” So far, so good.

This one reality is then said to be symbolized under two aspects: “absolute abstract Space,” and “absolute abstract Motion.” The latter of the two aspects represents “Unconditioned Consciousness.” This latter aspect is also symbolized as “The Great Breath.” The paragraph explaining these two aspects concludes:

Thus, then, the first fundamental axiom of the Secret Doctrine is this metaphysical ONE ABSOLUTE—BE-NESS—symbolized by finite intelligence as the theological Trinity.⁵

My intelligence may be more finite than that of others, but I did not follow how the two aspects of one thing became a trinity, when this one thing is unmanifested. I can guess that if a person counts the one reality separately, then along with its two aspects there is a trinity. But this is not stated.

Then follows further explanations given to assist the student. Herbert Spencer’s “First Cause,” we are told, cannot apply to the absolute, because “first” means something “first brought forth,” a manifestation, being therefore finite and conditioned. The absolute, then, is not the “First Cause,” but rather is the “Causeless Cause.”

We next find some Vedānta views and terminology used to explain the first fundamental proposition. The Vedānta term “Parabrahman” is used for “the One Reality, the Absolute.” It is described as “the field of Absolute Consciousness, *i.e.*, that Essence which is out of all relation to conditioned existence, and of which conscious existence is a conditioned symbol.” Here we must proceed carefully. Blavatsky is now explaining the one reality as such, not its aspect of “absolute abstract Motion representing Unconditioned Consciousness” described earlier. The potential confusion with the word “Consciousness,” used for both, is due to the fact that she is here giving the “esoteric and Vedāntin tenet” from “T. Subba Row’s four able lectures on

the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.” We must know that Advaita Vedānta holds Parabrahman to be absolute consciousness, while Blavatsky and her Mahatma teachers regularly describe the absolute as unconscious. See, for example, Stanza I.8 of the Book of Dzyan: “Alone the one form of existence stretched boundless, infinite, causeless, in dreamless sleep; and life pulsed unconscious in universal space, . . .”

Two more terms are here given for the two aspects described earlier of the one reality: “Spirit (or Consciousness)” and “Matter.” “Spirit (or Consciousness)” must correspond to the earlier described “absolute abstract Motion,” since this latter was said to represent “Unconditioned Consciousness.” This is confirmed in the following paragraphs, but only by putting together the statements that “the Great Breath assumes the character of pre-cosmic Ideation,” and that “pre-cosmic Ideation is the root of all individual consciousness,” while remembering that absolute abstract motion was earlier said to be symbolized by “the Great Breath.” In other words, absolute abstract motion = unconditioned consciousness = the great breath = spirit (or consciousness) = pre-cosmic ideation.

As for “Matter,” the other of the two aspects of the one reality, we must assume by default that this corresponds to the earlier described “absolute abstract Space,” although this is not stated. Similarly, we must assume that this corresponds to “pre-cosmic root-substance (*Mūlaprakṛiti*),” and “pre-cosmic Substance,” used in the following paragraphs. Again, we must know that the term *mūlaprakṛiti*, brought in from Subba Row as a Vedānta term, is here used in its Sāṃkhya sense as something real and eternal. It does not have this meaning in standard Advaita Vedānta.⁶ Subba Row used it esoterically as a Vedānta term having this meaning. The terms used for this aspect, then, are absolute abstract space = matter = pre-cosmic root-substance (*mūlaprakṛiti*) = pre-cosmic substance.

We are cautioned that these two, here called spirit (or consciousness) and matter, are “to be regarded, not as independent realities, but as the two facets or aspects of the Absolute (Parabrahman), . . .” We then read: “Considering this metaphysical triad as the Root from which proceeds all

manifestation, . . . ” As before, I can only assume that “this metaphysical triad” is the one absolute reality with its two aspects, though we have just been warned not to regard these as independent realities.

At the time of manifestation, she continues, “the Great Breath [or absolute abstract motion] assumes the character of pre-cosmic Ideation,” being the “*fons et origo*,” source and origin, of all individual consciousness. Likewise the other aspect of the absolute, “pre-cosmic root-substance (*Mūlaprakṛiti*),” is the substratum of all matter in its various grades of differentiation.

After explaining that “the contrast of these two aspects of the Absolute is essential to the existence of the ‘Manifested Universe,’” the one being unable to manifest without the other, Blavatsky introduces the idea of Fohat:

But just as the opposite poles of subject and object, spirit and matter, are but aspects of the One Unity in which they are synthesized, so, in the manifested Universe, there is “that” which links spirit to matter, subject to object.⁷

This is Fohat. The explanation of Fohat concludes with:

Thus from Spirit, or Cosmic Ideation, comes our consciousness; from Cosmic Substance the several vehicles in which that consciousness is individualized and attains to self—or reflective—consciousness; while Fohat, in its various manifestations, is the mysterious link between Mind and Matter, the animating principle electrifying every atom into life.⁸

Finally, we have the summary that is meant to afford a clearer idea to the reader:

(1). The ABSOLUTE; the *Parabrahman* of the Vedāntins, or the one Reality, SAT, which is, as Hegel says, both Absolute Being and Non-Being.

(2). The first manifestation, the impersonal, and, in philosophy, *unmanifested* Logos, the precursor of the “manifested.” This is the “First Cause,” the “Unconscious” of European Pantheists.

(3). Spirit-matter, LIFE; the “Spirit of the Universe,” the Purusha and Prakṛiti, or the *second* Logos.

(4). Cosmic Ideation, MAHAT or Intelligence, the Universal World-Soul; the Cosmic Noumenon of Matter, the basis of the intelligent operations in and of Nature, also called MAHA-BUDDHI. The ONE REALITY; its *dual* aspects in the conditioned Universe.⁹

The concluding sentence reiterates that the first fundamental proposition being explained here is the one reality with its two aspects. But I could find no way to correlate the four numbered items of this summary with the one reality and its two aspects, on the basis of the three pages of explanations that had just been given.

Item number (1) is clearly the one reality as such. There is no problem here.

Item number (2), of course, is not the one reality as such; but neither is it either of the two aspects of the one reality. Just what it is was not clear to me from the foregoing three pages. It was not clear how this “first manifestation” could also be the “*unmanifested* Logos, the precursor of the ‘manifested.’” The “manifested” proper is apparently one of the following numbered items. Nor was it clear how the “First Cause” comes about from the absolute, described as the “Causeless Cause.”

Item number (3) presents another problem. The terms spirit and matter have been used in the preceding explanations as the two aspects of the one reality (*puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are Sāṃkhya terms that correspond to spirit and matter). But they have not been used there hyphenated together, “Spirit-matter.” When we find the hyphenated term “Father-Mother” further on, it means these as a unity before their separation into distinct father and distinct mother. Of course, Blavatsky has explained that the one reality is a unity that has two aspects, spirit and matter. But if spirit-matter refers to this unity, how is it different from item number (1), the one reality as such? If it refers to spirit and matter as distinct in manifestation, how is it the “Spirit of the Universe?” Where would the matter of “Spirit-matter” then be? And what of the unexplained epithet “Life” used here? Could this not apply equally well to any of these four items?

Item number (4) seems to be even more problematic. “Cosmic Ideation” (or at least pre-cosmic ideation) has in fact been used for one of the two aspects only, absolute abstract motion, or spirit. But then, where is the other one, cosmic substance, or absolute abstract space, or matter, in this list of numbered items? And how is this one “the Cosmic Noumenon of Matter?” Further, have we not just had the two of them together in item number (3), spirit-matter? “Mahat” or “Mahā-Buddhi” are again Sāṃkhya terms, meaning, as stated here, “Intelligence,” as a universal principle (*tattva*). But these are not found in the explanations given on the preceding pages. Then, what about Fohat, which has not yet been accounted for? Are we to understand that this somehow goes here? These were some of the questions that I had.

So I was much better off in understanding the first fundamental proposition before reading this four item summary. Blavatsky undoubtedly had clearly in her mind what she meant here; so that when she concluded, “The ONE REALITY, its *dual* aspects in the conditioned Universe,” she thought these four items had clarified this. But unfortunately we do not have spelled out what she meant here; and as this summary stands, it is more confusing than helpful, at least to me. We must now try to make sense out of it.

The first numbered item refers to the omnipresent, eternal, boundless, and immutable principle, the one absolute reality, as such; and as noted above, there is no problem here. This is not the “First Cause”; rather, it is the “Causeless Cause.”

The second numbered item refers to the “First Cause,” but still the “*unmanifested* Logos.” The initial question is, how do we understand the difference between this and the one reality as such, requiring the “First Cause” to be distinguished from the “Causeless Cause,” when both are unmanifested. I believe that this is the question alluded to in Blavatsky’s explanation of the purport of Stanza II of the Book of Dzyan:

The stage described in Stanza II is, to a Western mind, so nearly identical with that mentioned in the first Stanza, that to express the idea of its difference would require a treatise in itself. Hence

it must be left to the intuition and the higher faculties of the reader to grasp, as far as he can, the meaning of the allegorical phrases used.¹⁰

Here is the problem. If the one reality is in fact immutable, as it is stated to be, it cannot change. So how can it manifest the universe? It cannot transform or evolve into the universe, as this would involve change in the unchangeable. How can there be manifestation or differentiation in the unmanifested and undifferentiated? When this question was raised in the journal she edited, *The Theosophist*, Blavatsky did make an attempt to explain this highly metaphysical conception, and thereby to express the subtle difference between the causeless cause and the unmanifested first cause. In doing so, she also addressed the related question of how the first cause can come about from the causeless cause.

This Brahma [neuter, the absolute; = Parabrahman] when viewed as the *fons et origo* [source and origin] of the Substance of the Universe is, as has been repeatedly said in these columns, *Mulaprakriti*—a term which, in the poverty of English metaphysical vocabulary, has been translated as “undifferentiated cosmic matter.” It has also been said that the *differentiation* of *Mulaprakriti* produces infinite forms of being. . . .

“Brahma”—our opponents argue,—“the *Mulaprakriti*, is made to undergo a differentiation, like matter, of which we have a physical conception, to form the visible universe. Therefore, Brahma is subject to change”

It must not for a single moment be supposed that *Mulaprakriti* or Brahma (Parabrahm) can ever undergo change of substance (*Parinama*). It is the Absolute Wisdom, the Only Reality, the Eternal Deity—to dissociate the word from its vulgar surroundings. What is meant by the differentiation of *Mulaprakriti* is that the primordial essence of all forms of existence (*Asat*) is radiated by it, and when radiated by it becomes the centre of energy from which by gradual and systematic processes of emanation or

differentiation the universe, as perceived, springs into existence. It is from our opponents' incapacity to grasp this highly metaphysical conception that all the evil flows. . . .

It is manifest from this that "Mulaprakriti" never differentiates but only emanates or radiates its first born Mahat-tattva¹¹

What we have here, then, is the doctrine of radiance or radiation, which does not involve change in the unchangeable. An analogous doctrine of radiance is found in Advaita Vedānta, and may be called *ābhāsa-vāda*.¹² It is one explanation in Advaita Vedānta for the appearance of diversity. Using this paradigm, we can explain how the universe comes into manifestation as follows. The universe is the radiance (*ābhāsa*) of Parabrahman, the one reality. No change occurs in Parabrahman in order for the universe to appear. This radiance is considered to be a false appearance, like seeing a snake where there is only a rope. The appearance involves only apparent change (*vivarta*), not actual change (*pariṇāma*). The doctrine of only apparent change or false appearance (*vivarta-vāda*) is now the basic teaching of all Advaita Vedānta. Even though this false appearance is illusory, it is held to take on the characteristics of a seed or germ, from which the universe evolves in an orderly manner.¹³

This radiance, which is a false appearance, which takes on the characteristics of a seed, can now be called the first cause, because it can change or evolve into the universe, unlike the changeless Parabrahman, the causeless cause. It is described in Vedānta treatises both as undifferentiated (*avyākṛta*), as it is in the above quotation from Blavatsky, and as unmanifested (*avyakta*), as it is in Blavatsky's four item summary from *The Secret Doctrine*.¹⁴ According to Śaṅkarācārya, it cannot be said to be different from or not different from the absolute Ātman or Brahman or Parabrahman,¹⁵ but we can now distinguish the "First Cause" from the "Causeless Cause," even when both are unmanifested. In this way we can also understand the related question of how the causeless cause can bring about the first cause, without itself undergoing any change. The first cause is merely its radiance.

This second numbered item, then, refers to something that is neither different nor not different from the one reality as such, the immutable causeless cause. It refers to the radiance of the one reality, still unmanifested, as the seed or germ of the universe, the mutable first cause.

Of the four numbered items, this second one was the most difficult. Once it became clear, the others immediately fell into place.

The third numbered item, “Spirit-matter,” “the Purusha [spirit] and Prakṛiti [matter],” is explained in a passage of *The Mahatma Letters*:

The conception of matter and spirit as entirely distinct, and both eternal, could certainly never have entered my head, however little I may know of them, for it is one of the elementary and fundamental doctrines of Occultism that the two are one, and are distinct but in their respective manifestations, and only in the limited perceptions of the world of senses. Far from “lacking philosophical breadth” then, our doctrines show but one principle in nature—spirit-matter or matter-spirit, the third the ultimate Absolute or the quintessence of the two—if I may be allowed to use an erroneous term in the present application—losing itself beyond the view and spiritual perceptions of even the “Gods” or Planetary Spirits. This third principle, say the Vedantic Philosophers—is the only reality, everything else being Maya, as none of the Protean manifestations of spirit-matter or Purusha and Prakṛiti have ever been regarded in any other light than that of temporary delusions of the senses.¹⁶

We may therefore conclude that “Spirit-matter” in item number (3) does in fact refer to the unity of spirit and matter, the two aspects of the one reality, before their (at least apparent) separation in manifestation. The difference between this item and item number (1), the one reality as such, is that here we have the one reality, or rather its radiance, the seed or germ of the universe, as polarized into its two aspects, immediately prior to manifestation. The one, while remaining a unity, has become polarized, and therefore potentially two.

The fourth numbered item, “Cosmic Ideation, MAHAT or Intelligence, the Universal World-Soul,” is also explained in a passage of *The Mahatma Letters*, once we know that the preceding item is a unity with two aspects, or the simple duality of spirit-matter.

Pythagoras had a reason for never using the finite, useless figure—2, and for altogether discarding it. The ONE, can, when manifesting, become only 3. The unmanifested when a simple duality remains passive and concealed.¹⁷

Two in manifestation necessarily become three, because any time there are actually two, there is also the relationship between them as the third. So the moment spirit becomes distinct from matter, their interplay also comes into being. This interplay is cosmic ideation, intelligence, the universal world-soul.

Thus it is only here, with the fourth numbered item, that actual manifestation occurs. The duality of spirit-matter, the third numbered item, must become a triplicity in order to manifest; otherwise, as the *Mahatma Letters* passage continues, “the duality could never tarry as such, and would have to be reabsorbed into the ONE.”¹⁸

Cosmic ideation becomes the basis or noumenon of all manifestation, including manifested physical matter as we know it; thus, “the Cosmic Noumenon of Matter.” But as in Sāṃkhya, where the terms *mahat* and *mahā-buddhi* used here come from, cosmic ideation is itself the first manifestation of unmanifested matter, or root substance (*mūlaprakṛti*). Manifestation takes place when unmanifested matter comes into conjunction or proximity with spirit; read esoterically, when the unity acquires polarity. Here as in Sāṃkhya, the first-born cosmic ideation proceeds to evolve into the entire manifested universe, going from subtle to dense, in an orderly and systematic manner.

Here follows a re-statement of the four item summary, incorporating the results discussed above of my rather too protracted inquiry, and including well-attested Sanskrit equivalents whenever these are available.¹⁹

1. There is an omnipresent (*sarvaga*), eternal (*nitya*), boundless (*ananta*), and immutable (*avikāra*) principle, the one reality. This absolute, like the Parabrahman of Advaita Vedānta, is beyond the range and reach of thought (*agocara*), so is inconceivable (*acintya*) and inexpressible (*nirabhilāpya*). It cannot properly be referred to as “being”; rather, to coin a new term, it is “be-ness.” It is without attributes (*nirguṇa*), and is essentially unrelated to manifested, finite being (*avyavahārya*). Yet it is the rootless root (*amūlaṃ mūlam*), the causeless cause, of all that was, is, or ever shall be (*bhūtaṃ bhavad bhaviṣyad iti sarvam*).

2. The radiance (*ābhāsa*) of the one reality becomes a center of energy, a germ (*garbha*), or seed (*bīja*). It is neither different nor not different (*na bhinnam nābhinnam*) from the one reality. Like the one reality, it is unmanifested (*avyakta*) or undifferentiated (*avyākṛta*); but unlike the one reality, it is the cause of manifestation or differentiation. It may therefore be called the first cause. This germ can now transform or evolve (*pariṇāma*) into the manifested universe (*vyakta*).

3. The germ becomes polarized, in this way becoming what we may term “spirit-matter” or “matter-spirit.” It is a single thing, still unmanifested, having at one pole spirit (*puruṣa*) and at the other pole matter (*prakṛti*). These are the two aspects of the one reality. The spirit aspect may also be called absolute abstract motion, unconditioned consciousness, and the great breath. The matter aspect may also be called absolute abstract space, and root substance or primordial substance.

4. The interaction of the two poles of spirit and matter produces cosmic ideation, the principle of intelligence in the universe (*mahat*), the universal world-soul (*ālaya-vijñāna*), also called the substratum consciousness. This is the first actual manifestation, although it is the third stage of the manifestation process. It is the basis of the entire manifested universe, from spirit to matter. Like the unmanifested, the manifested also has two poles. The interaction of the two poles of manifested spirit and matter produces cosmic energy or vital force, called Fohat.

The one reality; its dual aspects in the conditioned universe, and the three stages of cosmic manifestation.

This explanation has largely followed the Advaita Vedānta paradigm of *ābhāsa-vāda*, the doctrine of radiance. Blavatsky tells us that she used Vedānta concepts to explain the teachings of the trans-Himalayan esoteric school, since these were more familiar.²⁰ But her own Mahatma teachers were not Advaita Vedāntins. Their own preferred model was given in late 1881,²¹ although it does not seem to have been much followed up on. This model employs a trinity of space (or matter), motion, and duration. Here, motion is the correspondence of the Vedānta radiance. Motion is the *svabhāva*, or inherent nature, of eternal matter, “the one element.” Their doctrine may thus be called *svabhāva-vāda*.²² Speaking of the Svābhāvikas, followers of this doctrine, the Mahatma K.H. writes: “Their plastic, invisible, eternal, omnipresent and unconscious Svabhavat is Force or *Motion* ever generating its electricity which is life.”²³ Blavatsky shows that this *svabhāvatā* is the above discussed radiance:

Throughout the first two Parts [of vol. I of *The Secret Doctrine*], it was shown that, at the first flutter of renascent life, Svabhavat, “the mutable radiance of the Immutable Darkness unconscious in Eternity,” passes, at every new rebirth of Kosmos, from an inactive state into one of intense activity; that it differentiates, and then begins its work through that differentiation.²⁴

Using this model, where the inherent nature (*svabhāvatā*) of eternal matter is motion, the second numbered item could be stated, “The motion of the one element produces a center of energy, a germ, or seed. . . ,” etc., etc.

Since the one reality is inconceivable and inexpressible, whatever conceptual model we may use to describe it and its periodic manifestation is still a model; a model that may “lead towards the truth,” as Blavatsky says, but is not the truth itself.²⁵ This does not, however, make such models any less important. The most widespread model of the source and origin of the universe is that of a creator God. According to the Mahatma K.H., “belief in God and Gods” is the cause of two thirds of the evils that pursue humanity.²⁶ So our conceptual models do make a difference. Such a difference, in fact, that K.H. says

about the God-idea, “Our chief aim is to deliver humanity of this nightmare.”²⁷ It is not without importance, then, to refine our understanding of the conceptual models that Blavatsky and her teachers gave in its place.

NOTES

1. “The ‘Secret Doctrine’ and Its Study,” by Robert Bowen, 1932; reprinted in: *An Invitation to The Secret Doctrine*, by H. P. Blavatsky, Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1988, p. 2.

2. *The Secret Doctrine*, by H. P. Blavatsky, 1st ed., 1888; *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings* edition [edited by Boris de Zirkoff] (pagination unchanged), Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978, vol. 1, p. 13.

3. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 14.

4. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 14.

5. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 14.

6. The term *mūlaprakṛti* is not generally used in Advaita Vedānta. When it is, it is taken to mean simply *prakṛti*. In Advaita Vedānta, *prakṛti* is a synonym of *māyā*, illusion. As such, it is temporary rather than eternal. Thus, Subba Row’s esoteric view of *mūlaprakṛti* as eternal is not accepted in standard Advaita Vedānta. See, for example, the introduction to the translation of the *Vasudevamanana*, “considered by the Pandits in Southern India as the standard compendium on Advaita philosophy,” published in *Lucifer*, vol. 10, 1892, p. 48:

“T. Subba Row, in his learned *Bhagavad Gītā* lectures, has postulated three eternal principles in the fourth state [Turiya]: viz., Mūlaprakṛiti; the Logos, or Īshvara, or Nārāyana; and the Light from the Logos, or Daiviprakṛiti, or Fohat. He also states that Nirvāna, or Moksha, is attained by merging into the Logos, which, as he says, has the veil of Mūlaprakṛiti between it and Parabrahman. But the Brāhmins in Southern India are loth to accede to this proposition in the light of this and other authorities, on the ground that there can be no Māyā in Nirvāna, whereas, according to T. Subba Row, there is Mūlaprakṛiti in that state which they consider to be Māyā.”

The *Vasudevamanana*, one of the few Advaita Vedānta texts to use the term *mūlaprakṛti*, specifically equates it with *māyā* (illusion), *avidyā* (ignorance), etc. (*Lucifer*, vol. 10, 1892, p. 51). *Māyā* is said in Advaita Vedānta to be indescribable (*anirvacanīya*) as to its existence.

This is because it is without beginning, but it ends, in the case of a practitioner, when Brahman is realized. It is therefore not eternal.

Subba Row's use of *mūlaprakṛti* as the equivalent of the *avyaktam* (the "unmanifested") of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* was criticized by a Hindu Theosophist for giving a Sāṃkhya interpretation to a Vedānta concept ("Criticism on the Late Mr. T. Subba Row's *Bhagavad-Gītā*," by A. Krishnaswamy Iyer, *The Theosophist*, vol. 17, April 1896, pp. 425-427). But even Subba Row's defender on this issue agrees with standard Advaita Vedānta that *mūlaprakṛti* is a temporary illusion, saying that "Mulaprakriti is simply an illusory veil thrown over Parabrahman," and that Parabrahman was "existing anterior to it," and "does not perish during the Cosmic Pralaya" ("Subba Rao's *Avyaktam*," by C. R. Srinivasayangar, *The Theosophist*, vol. 17, July 1896, pp. 615-616).

In other words, *mūlaprakṛti* is not viewed in standard Advaita Vedānta, or even by Hindu Theosophists, as being eternal, despite Subba Row's insistence to the contrary. His is an esoteric view of it. Therefore, it can apply as an aspect of the one reality taught in the Secret Doctrine only in its Sāṃkhya meaning; that is, as something real and eternal.

Finally, we may note that the first use of *mūlaprakṛti* by Blavatsky was as a Sāṃkhya term. See "The Septenary Principle in Esotericism," *The Theosophist*, vol. 4, July 1883, pp. 253-256; *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, 1969, pp. 574-582.

7. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 16.

8. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 16.

9. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 16.

10. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 21.

11. "Victims of Words," *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 6, 1st ed., 1954; 2nd ed., Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1975, pp. 141-143. In this edition, throughout this article, the word "Brahma" is printed incorrectly as "Brahmā," with a circumflex on the last letter indicating that it is a long vowel. In the original printing in *The Theosophist*, vol. 5, Feb. 1884, p. 117, the word in its first two occurrences and once again later on is printed as "Brahmă," with a breve on the last letter indicating that it is a short vowel; and all other times as "Brahma," with no diacritical mark on the last letter, also indicating that it is a short vowel. The neuter "Brahma" with short vowel is clearly meant here, since its synonym is given as Parabrahman. "Brahma" is the correct declined form of this neuter word, but it is now generally written in its stem form "Brahman," in order to distinguish it from the masculine form "Brahmā" with long vowel. *Brahmā* or *Brahmā*, with

either a macron (as used now) or a circumflex (as used earlier) on the last letter, both indicating that it is a long vowel, is the creator god; while the neuter Brahma or Brahman is the impersonal absolute.

Note that errors like this in the *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, edited by Boris de Zirkoff, are rare. A great many more are found in the unedited writings of Blavatsky. So serious researchers will always benefit from the painstaking editorial work of Boris de Zirkoff.

12. This Advaita Vedānta doctrine is more commonly known as *pratibimba-vāda*, the doctrine of reflection, as it was developed in the *Vivaraṇa* school of Advaita Vedānta. I purposely refer to it here as *ābhāsa-vāda* in order to emphasize the radiance aspect of the teaching, and to avoid the sectarian controversy between the *pratibimba-vāda* and *avaccheda-vāda* (the doctrine of limitation) followers. On *ābhāsa*, see *Brahma-sūtra* 2.3.50, and Śaṅkarācārya's commentary thereon. On this doctrine in reference to the manifestation of the universe, see *Pañca-pādikā* by Padmapāda, chap. 26, verses 95 ff. For a good example of a brief text following this doctrine, see the *Laghu-vākya-vṛtti* by Śaṅkarācārya.

13. See, for example, Sureśvara's commentary on Śaṅkarācārya's *Pañcī-karaṇa*, verse 2 and following.

14. It is described as *avyakta* in Śaṅkarācārya's *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, verse 108, and as *avyākṛta* in Śaṅkarācārya's *Pañcī-karaṇa*, to give just two examples.

15. See Śaṅkarācārya's *Pañcī-karaṇa*, and also his *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, verse 109.

16. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, transcribed and compiled by A. T. Barker, 1st ed., 1923; 3rd rev. ed., Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1962, p. 138; chronological ed., Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993, pp. 282-283.

17. *The Mahatma Letters*, 3rd. ed., p. 341; chron. ed., p. 379.

18. *The Mahatma Letters*, 3rd. ed., p. 341; chron. ed., p. 379. On the necessity of a triplicity for manifestation, see Blavatsky's statement of the three stages of cosmic manifestation found in all theogonies, in *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 437.

19. There are, of course, many possible Sanskrit equivalents for the terms and ideas found in this summary, from various schools of thought. I have tried to choose the more widely used equivalents. Some come from the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, which Blavatsky referred to here. From an early translation of it she used the words, "unthinkable and unspeakable." Since these two words in other contexts have other

connotations, I have preferred “inconceivable” and “inexpressible.” For the first of these, the equivalent from the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* is *acintya*, and I have adopted this widely used Sanskrit term. For the second, the *Māṇḍūkya* equivalent is *avyapadeśya*. A much more widely used equivalent, in both Hindu and Buddhist texts, is *nirabhilāpya*. So I have adopted the latter. Note that the term *agocara* means only “beyond the range,” and “of thought” must be supplied.

20. See *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, 1st ed., 1959; 2nd ed., 1975, pp. 347-348; *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 20; vol. 2, p. 308 fn.

21. This model was first outlined in the “Cosmological Notes,” given by the Mahatma Morya to A. O. Hume, copies of which were made for A. P. Sinnett and Blavatsky. According to Daniel Caldwell, these were given about October 1881 (not January 1882, the date of the follow-up Mahatma letter no. 13 on the same subject). These were first published as an appendix in *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, transcribed and compiled by A. T. Barker, 1st ed., 1925; repr., Pasadena, California: Theosophical University Press, 1973. Further material on this model was given in Mahatma letters 15, 10, and 22; and in the important article, “What Is Matter and What Is Force?,” *The Theosophist*, vol. 3, Sep. 1882, pp. 319-324; reprinted in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, 1969, pp. 208-226.

22. *Svabhāva-vāda* is an ancient and little-known doctrine. *Svabhāva* is listed in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 1.2, along with five other things that had been proposed in the past as the source of the universe. All are here rejected in favor of Brahman as the source of the universe. There are no extant texts on *svabhāva-vāda*, only stray references such as this one. *Svabhāva* is the “inherent nature” of something; but of what is not clear. In its doctrine as refuted here, *svabhāva* is commonly explained as what makes swans white, for example. So it is understood as the inherent nature of individual things like swans. Early Buddhism in its teaching of individual *dharmas* also says that these have each their own inherent nature or *svabhāva*. But in the model given by the Mahatmas, *svabhāva* is the inherent nature of the one element. This alone produces all apparent diversity.

23. *The Mahatma Letters*, 3rd ed., p. 136; chron. ed., p. 281.

24. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, pp. 634-635.

25. “The ‘Secret Doctrine’ and Its Study,” by Robert Bowen, p. 3.

26. *The Mahatma Letters*, 3rd ed., pp. 57-58; chron. ed., p. 274.

27. *The Mahatma Letters*, 3rd ed., p. 53; chron. ed., p. 270.

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